

# **Teacher Education in a Globalised Age**

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## **Globalisation, education and teacher education - a critical review**

### **Introduction**

Globalisation is a catchphrase which has entered discussion in various fields and branches (Tikly 2001, 152; Gallagher 2005, 126). What follows is a critical review of contrasting perspectives on globalisation as it relates to education. In each section, after these general considerations, concerns are narrowed down to the effects of globalisation on education in relation to the teaching profession. Teacher identity will be explored in terms of the role of teachers in a given society and the way specific societies conceive of this identity and adopt criteria to judge teacher success and effectiveness. Given the ascendancy of the global economic model (Clayton 2004, 276), this discourse includes other agencies that are exerting or are attempting to exert their influence on teacher identities. Teacher education and its evolving nature cannot be isolated from teacher identity (Welmond 2002, 42) - the way globalisation is conceived of, and the role one assigns to teachers in relation to it, will definitely bear an influence on the manner in which teacher education is structured.

Hence, this paper will have the following structure:

I shall commence by defining globalisation, shedding light on the complexity of the global reality, the intensification of global interaction and the distinction between the descriptive and the prescriptive use of the term. This will take us to the second section in which I shall introduce the three main approaches, and their respective criticisms, that build my arguments - the a-critical, the reformist and the radical approach.

Consequently, Section 1.3 presents the positive approach, the idea that the world is a global society with resulting educational benefits, like wider access and new opportunities for research. The reformist approach, in Section 1.4, acknowledges the shortcomings of the current global situation and suggests ways that education systems

can adapt critically to this global reality. The last of the approaches, in Section 1.5, represents the views of radical critics of globalisation who maintain that only through critical resistance can one challenge dominant modes of pedagogy and power relations that exploit the oppressed. Concluding observations are found in Section 1.6.

### **1.1 Defining globalisation**

Globalisation can be defined as a world-sweeping arrangement based upon:

...a creed of lower trade barriers; an end to exchange controls; freer movement of investment capital; and the displacement of public sector capital by the private sector. (Fontana 1999, 367)

Globalisation has been understood to entail a homogenous set of economic forces impinging on every country, wherein nations are engulfed in a whirlwind-like global market, and induced to cut public expenditure and encourage private enterprise (Young 1998, 52). Despite the neatness of such descriptions and definitions, the global reality is very complex, and one must not succumb to the temptation of presenting globalisation in essentialist and reductionist terms; as an economic phenomenon homogenous in its effects and causes (Bray 2003, 210; Angus 2004, 24; Gallagher 2005, 126).

To start with, the phenomenon is not as new as it is frequently implied. Capitalism has had a 'global dimension' since it came into existence; involving places as distant as England, Portugal, Spain, Africa, India and China. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one could witness what may be called a 'global division of labour' between European manufacturing nations and colonial suppliers of raw material/markets. Moreover, such an economy was, after the 1870s, regulated according to an internally acknowledged parameter - the gold standard which fixed the international value of currencies (Fulcher 2004, 82/83). However, one has to acknowledge that global interaction has intensified in the past few years. Nowadays:

“Huge sums of money are transmitted across the world on a daily basis. Companies no longer produce in one country for export to others but run manufacturing operations in many different countries in distant parts of the world. Markets for goods and service, for capital and labour too, are in many ways global in extent.”  
(Fulcher 2004, 82)

Yet, despite these global forces and the growing power and influence of multinationals, globalisation is not a uniform phenomenon. The actual world situation comprises numerous divisions, different histories and traditions, and differing national policies (Young 1998, 52).

Even though new financial centres have emerged in developing countries and investment in 'emerging markets' has become, for a time at least, fashionable, most of the money still flows between North America, Europe and Japan ... in 1998 emerging markets accounted for only 7% of the world's capital, even though their countries contained around 85% of the world's population. (Fulcher 2004, 97)

Moreover, investment in poor countries is not spread over a large number of these, but heavily concentrated in a small number (China, India, Mexico, Brazil; whereas a continent like Africa is on the whole, excluded). Even multinationals generally operate only in a small number of countries and, in terms of production, cannot be considered 'global' given the number of countries involved (Fulcher 2004, 97/98).

Hence rather than referring to an actual, fully-fledged reality, globalisation should be understood as a **trend**; the trend involves a process whereby worldwide social and economic relations, linking distant localities to one another in such a way that events in one place are shaped by other events occurring miles away, are being intensified (Arnove 1999, 10).

Apart from this descriptive use (to illustrate an actual/developing state of affairs), the term 'global' can be used prescriptively, to refer to economic policies and creeds upheld by governments, trade organisations, monetary and financial institutions and individuals at large. The two uses are many a time intertwined. Hence, in some cases, contemporary discourses about globalisation and managerialism have actually been turned into 'regimes of truth'; i.e. the phenomenon in question is considered as an irresistible force - as inevitable as the sun rising in the morning - without much consideration to the contingency of the phenomenon in question and the agencies, political interests or logistics of those proposing the 'truth' in question. Hence, people are induced to comply with these discourses, and the values and perspectives they imbue (Angus 2004, 40).

In what follows I shall use 'globalisation as a phenomenon' to refer to the descriptive use of the term, and 'globalisation as a creed' to refer to its prescriptive function.

## **1.2 Globalisation and Education**

Globalisation, both as a phenomenon and as a creed, may influence and affect education. Different thinkers, philosophers of education and educators entertain different and contrasting perspectives on existing global trends and tendencies. Given the number and variety of positions, it is impossible to consider each and every theory regarding the influence of global trends on education. In what follows, I shall group these into three different classifications.

There are those who maintain an a-critical or indeed positive stance regarding this phenomenon and its influence on education. Others adopt a reformist attitude, and believe that, despite any shortcomings, education can be accommodated to suit this phenomenon. Others adopt a more pessimistic approach. I shall put forward representative perspectives from each group, and consider these critically. It is necessary to indicate, at this point, that there may be an overlap among these three approaches and particular perspectives can be related to more than one approach, depending on the intensity/nature of the view itself.

## **1.3 Accepting globalisation and adapting education to its demands**

Some theoreticians (Surian, 2001; Jarvis and Holford, 2005) hold that 'globalisation' may positively influence education, since it may bring together different peoples, ideas and resources in a world-wide pool. The whole world is becoming a global society; media and cyberculture are becoming more widespread. This is providing new opportunities for research and interaction to people who previously had no access to major libraries or research institutions (Kellner 2005, 102). Technological tools and developments can be applied to good use, so as to serve the needs of students across the world. This position holds that with capital shifting into a knowledge-based economy<sup>1</sup>, information and knowledge are fast becoming a high-priced new commodity. Knowledge has become a principal economic currency, and its rapid production and circulation have become a crucial input for economic performance.

As to the role of teachers, contemporary teacher education, at best, tends to take a politically neutral direction and, as a consequence, it is limited in the ways it can equip teachers to understand how forces of globalisation and Neo-Liberalism are not forces in their own right but connected to a wider system of exploitation.

Regarding this acceptance of globalisation, two main approaches exist.

### **The supply and demand approach**

The first focuses on the demand learners themselves make of the educational system and promotes the 'marketisation' of educational systems, whereby education is considered as a sort of commodity to be sold, bought and consumed, using the market-place as the analogue of the educational set-up (Hartley 2002, 251). Education is considered primarily as an economic output, structured along and responsive to the market's needs. Neo-Liberal thinkers combine this general approach - treating education primarily as an economic output - with the laws of supply and demand. This emphasis on supply and demand should not be mistaken for a policy similar to that in force in Malta in the late 70's and early 80's, when the Socialist government regulated the intake of university students in relation to the needs of the labour market. 'Demand' here refers to the choices individuals make, as for instance, in choosing a course of studies at university, regardless of the motives, rationality or feasibility of the choice. If there are enough students willing to register and pay for a 'career-wise futile' course, then it makes economic sense for the university to cater to this demand. It is very likely, however, that the market itself will in the long run decimate such demand, once students realise the unfeasibility of the course in question. This Neo-Liberal approach is also likely to promote features like managerialism, competition and market arrangements (Arnove 1999, 10; Angus 2004, 24). Globalisation widens the availability of clients and resources to be used in such regards. Moreover, as technologies like the internet have matured to a ubiquitous medium for learning, business and lifestyles, an internet-based computer-mediated approach to distance education can help bridge the space and time constraints of global markets (Jellen and Alon 2004/5, 136).

Regarding teachers, this approach has induced some to view teachers as essentially economic actors, drawn to and retained by the profession in terms of economic costs

and benefits. This is something which in many ways is already enacted, as a World Bank document (Farrell and Oliveira 1993, 7) that examines teacher policy, reveals. The document states that policy-makers in different societies tend to include cost effectiveness within the definition of teacher effectiveness, and tie effectiveness to a given demand. The teacher is one input amongst others in the production process, whose purpose is precisely defined in terms of quantifiable outputs - the learning achievement of students.

In the era of Neo-Liberalism where emphasis is on output, teachers' remuneration and security of employment is increasingly directly linked to student learning (Welmond 2002, 47). Policies are being enacted that attempt to improve students' achievement by providing teachers with the right incentive packages. These policies emphasize linkages among pay, control and achievement. In this regard, school effectiveness literature<sup>2</sup> has constructed a particular paradigm of teacher identity, based on the expectation that teachers produce student achievement.

It is very likely that within this approach which seeks to marketise 'education', teacher education will be subject to the laws of supply and demand, and its aim will be to make teachers and educators 'marketable'. It will take into consideration the demands consumers in the educational market are making, and seek to cater to this with an adequate supply of teachers having the required characteristics.

This approach may seem appealing because it seems to be responsive to people's choices, needs and desires rather than imposing homogenous models. Hence, it may avert the criticism generally made, that global models are imposed by some set of people on others.

### **Limitations to the supply and demand approach**

Still, a number of shortcomings are evident, particularly regarding the role teachers are expected to play<sup>3</sup>. This approach urges teachers to cater to students' demands. Yet, given that the demand may change and that this may happen quite rapidly, teachers would have to be subject to constant retraining so as to be able to cater to changing requests. A major problem in such regard is that the rate of change in tastes and

choices may be too fast to be catered to adequately and so allow for thorough retraining. Nevertheless, such retraining is something teacher education cannot ignore, even if the 'market-model' of education is abandoned, if anything because the changes that are occurring on a global scale, like knowledge-driven economies, technological revolutions and development of communication systems, seem to entail this (Bonal and Rambla 2003, 170).

Moreover, teachers are made responsible to implement the necessary innovations to cope with social and economic changes. They must show capacity to interpret future requirements of work and life and constantly update their knowledge and teaching skills to keep up with rapidly changing global requirements, involving shifts in technology and widening social relations. They are called upon to model the skills-oriented subject without raising questions about what it means to live in a democratic society; questions about the relationship between democracy and capitalism. A pedagogic ambiguity is created because no concrete definitions of content, teaching methods and evaluation methods are considered to be the ideal ones. This creates risk-awareness, uncertainty and dislocation among teachers and they end up being blamed for lack of educational quality, resistance to change and innovation in teaching methods (Bonal and Rambla 2003, 179).

In addition, I believe that the positive emphasis on the choices people make seems to be naïve and smacks of voluntarism<sup>4</sup>. The choices people make are not totally objective or made in a vacuum, but occur within specific and concrete contexts, in which features like employability, prestige and recognition play an important part. Regarding these features (i.e. employability, prestige and recognition), there are stakeholders (large industries, powerful groups, etc.) with specific interests and agendas, which determine these.

### **Economic efficiency in education**

The second approach which attempts to adapt education to this global economic/political/social situation aims at making the learner as economically competitive as possible. Economic-efficacy is understood in this approach to be education's major aim (Welmond 2002, 42). Yet, rather than leaving education at the

mercy of the laws of supply and demand understood in the manner delineated in the first attitude, here it is the needs of the economy at large which determine the content and pedagogy of the educational set-up. Hence, if the world economy requires people with more sophisticated technical skills, the wider teaching of skills like media and computer literacy is promoted and students are taught how to use these new technologies of information and entertainment, so as to be able to succeed in a hi-tech economy (Jellen and Alon 2004/5, 136). Competitiveness-driven reforms, i.e. reforms aimed at educating society at large so as to make it more economically competitive, are enacted to attain such ends. In this regard, Fischman (2001, 415) maintains that globalised economies need flexible and creative workers. This necessitates students to develop a fundamental ability - trainability; the disposition to be continuously taught and trained. Students must be able to cope with new requirements of 'work' and 'life'. The worth or significance of such requirements is determined by market forces (Bonal and Rambla 2003, 174).

This approach generally entails greater regulation and standardisation regarding the ends of education, pedagogy and teaching. These standardising trends are given impetus, not only with regard to a national educational system, but even on an international scale (Jarvis and Holford 2005, 98). An example of this can be drawn from the EU, wherein the internalisation of higher education, common norms and practices and the Education Research Area are promoted, in order to increase academic mobility, exchanges and partnerships within the EU (Musselin 2004, 56). Yet, as with the globalisation of the economy, this international standardisation of education indicates a trend rather than a fully-fledged state of affairs. Bonal and Rambla, and Musselin maintain that education systems and policies remain largely controlled by the state and point to the deep divergences that exist among academic labour markets. Each country is developing its own solutions and answers to the evolving circumstances (Bonal and Rambla 2003, 171; Musselin 2004, 58). Proponents of this approach point to the benefits that are likely to ensue from such standardisation and regulation (Hartley 2002, 251). For instance, centralised provision of The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) to secondary school students - a course of studies which is highly required in view of the dominant position of Microsoft in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) market - may

enhance multinational investment in the country in question. Moreover, international interaction may also be facilitated and enhanced.

Regarding teachers, these need to rethink the necessary collective responses to global challenges that are influencing the teaching profession, where the word 'challenges' is generally understood to mean the challenges and opportunities entailed by a capitalist economy (Fischman 2001, 417). Teachers are expected to mould students in light of economic trends and challenges, and to pass the skills necessary to create a workforce capable of achieving these. In light of this, teacher education is likely to be highly standardised. This implies that teacher education programmes are regulated by the state or by local education authorities. Teachers would be subject to formal and bureaucratic benchmarks regarding their performance (Welmond 2002, 43). The pedagogies these endorse are usually didactic and traditional. In view of the economic ethos of such an attitude, teacher education programmes are also meant to be cost effective.

### **Limitations to the economic efficiency approach**

One should note that this drift towards standardisation is not limited to government initiatives. Through the influence of electronic media, genres are set by curriculum design experts. These generally lead to the standardization not only of the topic itself, but also of the logistics through which the topic itself is learnt. This, as Baker (2005, 65) argues, can involve many drawbacks - educators tend to become checklist teachers; their profession would lack risks, unpredictability and the magic of teaching. Furthermore, Hartley (2002, 255) points out that a cheap, one-size-fits-all 'standard' in teacher education may turn out to be ineffective with regard to the promotion of human resources and the competitiveness of the economy in general. The knowledge economy requires creativity, collaboration and self-management; the teacher is afforded a greater autonomy to adopt innovate teaching methods and is responsible for maximising knowledge acquisition. These are features which standardised models are unlikely to promote. Besides, the demand for teachers to take new and broader responsibilities, albeit in itself being a competence, is not easily specifiable in competence terms. Hence, attempting to specify and accrediting teacher competencies is not without its difficulties and contradictions (Young 1998, 62).

Teachers may not share common social, economic and cultural characteristics, and hence it may not be a good idea to standardise teacher education (Hartley 2002, 254). In this regard, it is worth noting that despite these centralising trends, the influence of the state is not total. Indeed, there are experiments aimed at promoting a deregulation of the providers of teacher education programmes at varying levels, in response to broader cultural and economic conditions. A settlement is generally formed among these different factors which mould the teachers' identity.

I feel that it is also necessary to bear in mind that standardisation and cost effectiveness may prove to be contradictory aims. Policy-makers are caught between policies which foster economic competitiveness and policies which are cost-saving, standardised and seek efficiency (Hartley 2003, 83). If teacher education is standardized, it may be efficient in terms of costs, but not necessarily effective in light of the prevailing knowledge-based economy. By containing the unit cost of education and decreasing spending, the continued growth of educational opportunities stipulated by competitiveness-driven reforms may be seriously hampered (Welmond 2002, 42).

Moreover, with such standardised models, wherein paradigms are set and 'imposed' by government and teachers are merely expected to fit into these, teacher education programmes may end up perpetuating passivity, subservience and even resistance. Teachers develop to externally imposed and culturally inappropriate ideas, because they do not set the goals or control the process. In this regard, Myrick notes the lack of concern for the experience of teachers and their professional status (Myrick 2004, 26). If techniques/approaches are not developed in collaboration with the participants, there is the danger of them not being relevant. This disengagement can be observed when some new textbook and its subsequent training is introduced in schools without the teachers being consulted. Teachers complain because they feel they can contribute their experience and expertise in the choice of book. Indeed, the viability of such an approach is disputable even from a purely economical point. When there is an overemphasis of knowledge produced by 'experts', who are far from the reality of schools' everyday life, knowledge of practice or knowledge developed from practice is downgraded (Dahlström, Swarts and Zeichner 1999, 160). This does not augur well

for the needs of a knowledge-driven economy, the distinctive assets of which are knowledge, skills and creativity.

### **Supply/demand and economic efficiency - limitations to both approaches**

Despite the differences between these approaches (regulation and standardisation vs. individual choices and market forces), I believe that what is common to both approaches is their trouble-free adaptation to the global economic model and their referring primarily to economic aspects and aims as the goals to which education ought to adapt itself. Regarding teachers, these approaches ignore the role teachers may have as possible agents of change and aim exclusively at having the teachers fit the capitalist/global economic models they accept. Teachers are considered as mere functions of the economy at large, as indeed are the students to which these models are intended to cater.

Indeed, it is the limited scope of the aims they put forward that makes them liable to some serious criticism. They seem to narrow down excessively the roles of education in general and of teachers in particular. Their main deficiency is arguably their failure to include critical elements both within the models they promote and in relation to globalisation. Globalisation is accepted *tout court*. What emerges from this uncritical acceptance is an idealised model of what globalisation is all about. Thus, it is not surprising that the critical function of teachers seems frequently shunned.

### **Global educational models - a criticism**

In this section I shall attempt to discuss how the proliferation of global educational models, which uncritically accept globalisation and adapt education to the demands of globalisation, incorporates considerable limitations, both on a general level, and on the teacher education level in particular.

Global educational models that promote collaborative efforts across continents and countries tend to conceal certain shortcomings, in that they disrupt traditional ways of teaching, knowing and learning and provide a threat to cultural diversity (Commeyras and Mazile, 2001; Jarvis and Holford, 2005). A complex system of power relations

and control induces, maintains and legitimates pedagogy, in the sense that it distributes its own consciousness, identity and desire (Bonal and Rambla 2003, 173). The group in power tries to incorporate its own culture into curricula and educational programmes and reproduce it in the next generation to the exclusion of less powerful and sub-cultural groups, like women and minorities (Jarvis and Holford 2005, 97). The cultural status quo is perpetuated and the interests of the dominant groups are reflected (McCarthy 2003, 130). A case in point is the emergence of invisible pedagogies linked to the new middle classes, who organise knowledge and power asymmetrically so that the former buttresses the latter. Hence, working-class children find it difficult to cope with invisible pedagogies perpetuated by the middle classes, because the school assumes that all children arrive with similar educational goals (Bernstein's discourse, as cited by Bonal and Rambla, 2003 172).

These structural imbalances influence the effectiveness of the position one adopts in any exchange undertaken. This can be witnessed, for instance, in the different degrees of prestige types of knowledge enjoy - that proliferated by the Western World is more valued, accepted and seen as authentic and valid than Indigenous knowledges and wisdoms (Crossley and Tickly 2004, 149). Yet, a growing dissatisfaction with Western scientific endeavours can ensue because of their inability to describe all that occurs in people's experiences of the world.

One may retort that adapting education to such competitive goals need not ignore these differences, varieties and idiosyncrasies. Indeed, suggestions are made, regarding technological developments and the global proliferation of educational courses through distance learning, as to the need for these to be culturally sensitive to the learners for whom they are provided. Course-offerings need to be made relevant to the educational systems in different countries. Thus, teaching approaches may need to be modified to support students from different cultural backgrounds. In designing electronic learning environments, materials, tools and resources may need to be customised in order to enhance the students' learning experiences (Selinger 2004, 238). Such modifications could redress any initial imbalance.

Unfortunately, these suggestions concern only the adaptation of international educational systems structured in relation to given economic goals for particular

environments. They do not deal with who is to determine the goals education should aim at and/or the economic goals themselves. They ignore a fundamental aspect - power<sup>5</sup>. By ignoring this, educational programmes which take for granted current educational/economic aims and are adapted to particular environments, may prove to be a more effective tool through which dominant class/groups/nations may exert/consolidate their economic/cultural/political control over others, compared to crudely standardised and homogenous programmes. It is easier for a dominant group or class to induce others to accept as the natural order of things its values and interests and its way of seeing the world and social relationships, through the use of an idiom that appears familiar to the dominated classes/groups, than it is by using one which would seem foreign or imposed from outside.

At this point I feel it is worth mentioning the global phenomenon of educational models that are aimed at aligning education and the capitalist economy. These models are criticised for the implications they hold on the teachers concerned, as they seem to entail the impoverishment of teachers' professional role (Fischman 2001, 416).

Teachers are being re-defined as technical practitioners rather than professionals. This is in line with a new professional profile which is gradually emerging - the teacher is more of a knowledge manager than a knowledge expert (Bonal and Rambla 2003, 171). This has resulted in increasing lack of autonomy for teachers in how and what they teach and in deskilling at an international level (Fischman 2001, 417). It has also led to teacher demoralisation, and a fall in recruitment (especially in areas like physics and technology) is a response to the direction towards which teacher education has evolved. As Young (1998, 55) explores, teacher education is moving towards technocratic modernisation - teacher responsibility is increasingly limited to monitoring students and preparing them for tests.

Having said this, one has to say that this alignment of education and economy has not been the only cause of such decline in the appeal of teaching as a profession. Other factors one can refer to are the interests teachers hold; the teachers' acceptance and compliance with such models; the hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of schools; the failure of governments to promote rich professional development models and the application of scientific methods, computers and business efficiency models to

education, which is creating a conflict in teacher education since it is at odds with the increasingly complex and diverse roles of teachers (Fischman 2001, 415).

#### **1.4 Reformist approaches to globalisation**

Having referred to the shortcomings of global economy/educational models that accept these uncritically, the question arises as to whether one should abandon any effort to adapt education to the current global situation. Some theorists (Commeyras and Mazile, 2001; Saito, 2003) would answer in the negative and claim that education can/ought to be adapted to the current global situation, though not naively. An approach to education need not merely accept the developing global economic situation and adapt itself uncritically to it. The nature of the global economic set-up and of education itself suggests the feasibility of such a possibility.

Economy is no monolith, as seen in my remarks in the introductory part. As to education, a number of authors (Commeyras and Mazile 2001, 199; Jelen and Alon 2004/5, 125) point out that, despite the homogenising and hegemonic influences of global education and culture, these are neither monolithic nor is everything fatalistically foreordained. For instance, regarding the homogenising tendencies criticised earlier<sup>6</sup>, local and global aspects may be reconciled if providers of education on an international scale design programmes which, though standardized and abiding to international standards of professionalisation, take into account idiosyncrasies of tradition, culture and environment. Students, then, would be engaged in such international programmes in ways that allow them to acknowledge their cultures and enable spaces within educational settings where empowerment and liberation, rather than domination, can take place (Commeyras and Mazile 2001, 199; Jelen and Alon 2004/5, 125).

As for teachers, these, like all other stakeholders in education, need not accept passively the current economic-social-political status quo. Indeed, teacher education programmes could be set which, rather than adopt a neutralist approach towards globalisation, enable teachers to examine the phenomenon critically and help them devise critical-political pedagogies in light of values other than those of the economy.

Given this, one may presume that education can contribute to change; the extent and desirability of change possible are contentious matters. Approaches exist which invite people within education to think critically about the global situation, and attempt to reform the situation, rather than merely adapt themselves to it. Teachers need to know, and educate their students about causes, dynamics and outcomes of trans-national forces (Arnove 1999, 10). Now, such a critical approach need not consider globalisation and globalising trends in education as entirely negative phenomena, but should attempt to reform these in light of certain non-economic goals.

### **The dialogical approach**

One such 'reformist' approach to the relationship between education and globalisation is adopted by Naoko Saito in his paper "Education for global understanding: Learning from Dewey's visit to Japan." Here, Saito discusses the relation between globalisation and education in light of John Dewey's views on education and knowledge (Saito 2003, 1759). Globalisation is a phenomenon which contains a number of shortcomings, yet opportunities exist that may enable educators to circumvent such limitations. Detractors accuse the current global set-up of being biased in favour of politically and economically hegemonic groups and nations. Approaches like the two articulated in the previous section reinforce such a hegemony, through the promotion of the culture and values of such groups.

Saito contends that in order to do away with such shortcomings one need not abandon the ideal of global education and supra-national educational models. The key concepts which ought to characterise such models are 'dialogue' and 'global-understanding'. In this regard, he refers to Dewey's promotion of notions like that of 'unity in diversity'; solidarity and the fusion of and interaction between different perspectives regarding knowledge and pedagogy. Such a dialogical approach (like for instance exposing students to foreign cultures and enabling international exchange programmes) should enable different participants in the global debate to find common ground regarding their aims and projects.

The gist of all this, together with the need for teachers to know more about the world beyond their national and continental borders, seems to feature also in Commeyras

and Mazile's (2001, 199) paper: "Imagine life in another country on another continent: Teaching in the age of globalization." They maintain that technological changes and increasing economic opportunities greatly intensified the necessity for teachers to think like globalists, to collaborate with teachers from different classrooms and countries, while affirming their diversity in their own setting and at a global level.

### **Limitations to the dialogical approach**

In my opinion, these invitations seem to suffer from **a kind of idealism wherein one understands reality and its mechanics as a function of some ideal, idea or set of ideas**. The ideal of unity promoted has a number shortcomings.

In terms of logistics, if common ground between different parties is found, there is no guarantee that this will be consistent and consonant, due to the difficulty of coming to a mutual understanding with those who are different or who have different interests. First of all different conceptions of knowledge and pedagogies may be contradictory and mutually inconsistent. For instance, regarding the teaching profession, there are the different and competing conceptions of teachers' rights and responsibilities (as well as the different ways of understanding success or effectiveness in teaching). Besides, the way teachers respond to these demands has serious implications for the evolution of education sectors (Welmond 2002, 38). Moreover there are each teacher's personal assumptions and expectations, which may be discrepant or contrary.

A proponent of this approach may recognise these shortcomings, yet claim that these may be curtailed or circumvented through the dialogue it suggests. The recognition of such shortcomings would constitute a challenge rather than a stumbling block. Yet, such a reply seems to limit itself to inconsistent conceptions of knowledge and education and fails to consider something deeper than these - contradictory and mutually exclusive interests. These conceptions may in fact reflect the different interests of different groups within society, the conflict of which may place contradictory demands upon the educational systems and upon teachers.

The occurrence of exchanges termed 'dialogue' or the agreement upon stances designed as 'common ground' reached between, say, dominant class and dominated classes; Neo-Imperialist forces and the third world, etc., is no guarantee that

shortcomings entailed by the economic/political system are being curtailed. Even in our society, much discourse regarding 'social partnership' or 'class fellowship' (coupled with injunctions as to the unfeasibility and anachronistic nature of militancy and protest), seems a badly curtailed attempt by dominant groups and their institutions to emasculate the rest of society and induce it to accept their values and interests. Moreover, Saito's suggestion seems to make dialogue the key to change; to circumvent much of the ills globalised education reproduces, according to its critics. This suggestion underestimates the resistance that hegemonic groups are likely to make to any attempt to change current vertical global-trending relations to more horizontal and levelled ones. The question here arises as to why culturally and economically hegemonic groups should undertake dialogue with others on equal grounds, if it is not in their interest to do so. Hence the possibility of horizontal dialogue between politically hegemonic groups on the one hand, and excluded ones on the other, is highly unlikely.

Such naïve thinking seems to underlie all those suggestions which make education the panacea of all social/political evils. Rather than change current economic/political set-ups, these seem to assume that educational reforms are both necessary and sufficient to address all ills. Such thinking is idealistic not merely because it assumes that a change in the realm of ideas and thinking will be the motor that determines concrete and fundamental changes in the real world, but because it generally fails to consider the stakes and interests involved in education, which undoubtedly influence the resistance, reluctance or lack of these in relation to any proposed change.

### **The progressive approach**

Another reformist approach is that suggested by Morrow and Torres (1999, 100). As with Saito, they point out that one cannot escape the current global economic/technological context. Rather, students and educators have to intervene in this context and attempt to deflect these forces (something which they believe is possible) towards progressive ends. In this regard they suggest three aims which education should uphold:

- The first may be termed 'critical adaptation to the new situation'. This entails the pedagogical transformations which must be as revolutionary as the

technological transformations taking place (Morrow and Torres 1999, 102). However, this does not necessitate the mere adaptation of pedagogies so as to enable individual students to deploy multiple technologies in light of the individualistic aims the capitalist economy might promote. Rather, they have human well-being in general and communitarian terms as their aim (Morrow and Torres 1999, 101). The need to make the most of these technological advances and the opportunities they provide to educators wishing to enhance education has been emphasised by Kellner (2005, 102). Starting from the duty teachers have to illuminate the nature and effects of globalisation; to counter globalisation's oppressive forces and to empower individuals to understand the phenomenon and act effectively, he points that the internet and other new technologies may help educators devise strategies aimed at producing active and democratic citizens. Teaching skills such as media and computer literacy may empower students to deploy multiple technologies for progressive purposes.

- This communitarian aspect points to a second aim education should have, what may be termed the 'humanistic aim'. This requires the acknowledgement of a wide range of other literacies often neglected in schooling, like the training in philosophy, ethics, value thinking and humanities. It entails the rethinking of the concepts of literacy and the very nature of education. Education should not merely provide the skills through which the individuals may carve their niche in the current socio-economic world, but be able to analyse this critically and in light of humanistic (not merely economic) criteria.
- The third aim of a critical approach to education should be social justice (Morrow and Torres 1999, 108). Pedagogical strategies ought to be devised to demonstrate the existent threats to democracy and freedom, and expose students to ways in which new technologies can be organized to create a more democratic and egalitarian, multicultural society. This third aim seems to entail a qualitative leap compared to Saito's proposal. Rather than a vague concept like 'dialogue', it entails recognition of existing power groups and shortcomings, which presumably, would entail the acquisition of a critical conscience by excluded groups and attempts to make up for this.

## **Limitations to the progressive approach**

A shortcoming of this approach is that it still seeks an adaptation, albeit a critical one, to the global-capitalist model as its ultimate aim. Though such an aim may rightly be envisaged as a short-term solution, the question arises as to whether it can be maintained in the long run, given the ethos of the global-capitalist economy.

Capitalism is based upon exploitation and unequal exchange, lest no profits be made.

When products are produced through the work of labourers using the means of production supplied by the capitalist, the labourers receive in wages less than the value of the products their labour-power creates. Hence, profit results from the exploitation of workers by the capitalist; following this, the product is sold, bought, exchanged, etc. and further profit ensues, produced through something getting more value (known as surplus value) than s/he invested initially in the exchange, and somebody else getting less than his/her initial investment. Globalisation widens further this relationship. Despite neither the economy nor education being monoliths, could such a contradictory arrangement - exploitative global economy on one hand and humanistic educational set-up on the other, be envisaged as permanent?

Regarding the teacher, this approach seems to entail that teachers are to utilise their pedagogical skills and expertise to resist and challenge the dominant forces of capitalist schooling without specifying the necessary training to do so. Besides, even granting that these pedagogical tools are transmitted in teacher education programmes, and without diminishing in any way the important role of the teacher in having an influential impact on the learners concerned, it is quite idealistic to suppose that the community at large can become empowered through the work of teachers alone. Additional sophisticated, social and political mechanisms need to come into play in order to engage the whole community in critical thought with the outcome of overcoming oppressive forces.

### **1.5 Radical critics of globalisation**

Others theorists (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001; Bonal and Rambla, 2003) paint a bleaker and less hopeful picture of globalisation, and indicate the undesirability of adapting education to such a set-up. However, a number of them conceive of education as a means through which critical resistance to such a phenomenon may be

mounted. Hence this part will contain two sections; one dealing with the shortcomings of the global model; the other with possible ways in which education may help one engage with this phenomenon and the influence it is exerting on education.

### **Globalisation and its negative effects on education**

Let's consider the first aspect first. There are a number of ways in which, according to critics, globalisation has affected negatively education, for instance, in terms of funding and provision. According to Gallagher (2005, 122), the quality of education has generally fallen, due to global forces operating at trans-national level and the limits these set to the autonomy of individual states. This is because it is becoming increasingly difficult for states to deliver adequate educational support when the free market philosophy runs rampant.

Capital is increasingly being transferred from the public to the private sphere. The increasing inability, or unwillingness of governments to fund rising enrolments places a strain on universities to sustain their research and teaching activities through other sources of income (Welch 2001, 479).

A case in point is what happened in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the old Communist States in East and Central Europe - a loose confederation of states was established, most of which suffered economic and education decline. The consequences were an increase in the personal costs of education and an increase in private education. A similar situation could be observed in South Africa where a programme developed by the government with the aim to tackle the inequalities inherited from apartheid had been replaced by another policy which placed more emphasis on economic competitiveness, prioritised export-led growth and downplayed social programmes. Major inequalities between schools and provinces remained, with schools in Black townships being the most disadvantaged (Gallagher 2005, 122-124).

A detractor might point to the anomaly of the examples given. He or she might claim that in such countries Neo-Liberal policies have failed not because they are deficient in themselves, but because of the inadequate models (Communist and Apartheid that

preceded them). Yet, should one look at the situation in Latin America, the picture is similar - one realizes that with Neo-Liberal strategies, the whole system has been weakened without achieving any real improvement in the quality of basic education. Decentralization introduced disorder, rather than efficiency, in educational systems. In Argentina, for instance, globally integrated open economies required an internationally competitive workforce strong in science and technology. Nevertheless, the country failed to meet these challenges<sup>7</sup>. The big cutbacks in public funding and the increase in poverty eliminated any possibility of either improving the competitiveness of the workforce, or encouraging scientific and technological developments.

Even when considering industrialised nations, the impact of globalisation on their educational set-up has not been favourable. The shortcomings have not been only economic, but also political and cultural. For instance, one can witness the growing commercialization and corporatization of public schools (the businessification of schooling), which in turn are forced to accept corporate funding. This has resulted in a shortage of qualified teachers, school textbooks, resources and materials. Public schools have become new consumer markets for corporate propaganda (McLaren and Farahmandpur 2001, 290). Because of lack of government funding, trans-national corporations are privatising socially produced knowledge (knowledge attained collectively in schools, universities, etc.) associated with the educational system and sponsoring research centres in universities<sup>8</sup>. The latter has transformed public universities into corporate-operated 'technopolises' (hubs of hi-tech industries and marketing; 'research and development' being the operative term), the outcome of which is a high-tech colonization of education. Education is fast becoming an extension of the market economy. Pedagogy is reduced to a commodity in a deregulated labour market (McLaren and Farahmandpur 2001, 288).

### **The implications for teaching and learning**

This phenomenon is negative because the ultimate goal of education seems to have become that of assisting students to adapt to a corporate structure, trained to identify with, rather than criticise, cultural and social authorities. Professors and students have

little or no direct contact at all and the focus is only on those students (graduate) who directly assist faculties in their research endeavours (Myrick 2004, 26).

This also implies that progress is defined as the accumulation of compartmentalised learning - the ongoing move towards professionalism and specialisation through narrow, goal-oriented education and action-based expertise promotes a very mechanistic view of teaching and learning, and denies the individual of any legitimacy. Little interest is shown by contemporary educational policy makers in what is the aim of teaching apart from the economy; the effects of new plans on the quality of life of either teachers or students, and society at large. There is the risk that teaching becomes a form of impersonal transaction with no need for the teacher to have any authentic encounter with the student or the curriculum - in contrast to a centuries' old tradition of conceiving of education (going back to Socrates and Plato) as a joint venture involving interested and engaged participants.

Moreover, doubts remain as to whether, from a purely economic point of view, accumulation of knowledge, compartmentalised learning and lack of genuine social encounters with the teacher and the learning community, are really helping students to carve out a better living.

Besides, even assuming this educational model reaches the economic goals it sets, it still reflects the shortcomings of the Neo-Liberal social model as such, wherein any notion of 'community', 'concern' and 'society' is actually debunked. As Conservative MP Douglas Hurd once commented following a visit to a market town in middle England:

“What you find are too many young people with too much money in their pockets, too many pints inside them, but too little notion of the care and responsibility they owe to others.” (Hurd, as cited by Pugh and Flint 1997, 127)

The educational model designed to accommodate itself to a global economy does not seem to encourage such notions either.

Moreover, despite the diversity of its impact and the fact that globalisation and education are no monoliths, thinkers like Bonal and Rambla have claimed that globalisation has generally colonised the pedagogic field and educational policy in

definite and harsh terms (Bonal and Rambla 2003, 183). Dominant pedagogies and modalities are imposed through new curriculum policies and reforms, so as to buttress Neo-Liberal values and assumptions, and, in certain cases, maintain and reinforce dominant groups. An example of the former could be seen in Spain in the late 90s - discourses about the lack of educational quality and policies of evaluation of school and student performance were used as political tools to promote performance-oriented pedagogies. Examples of the latter have already been alluded to. Groups in power incorporate their own culture into curricula and educational programmes. In this way they reproduce power relationships, exclude less powerful and sub-cultural groups, like women and minorities (Jarvis and Holford 2005, 97), and are a threat to cultural diversity (Commeyras and Mazile, 2001; Jarvis and Holford, 2005).

### **A critical pedagogy**

But even assuming the phenomenon to be as negative as these make it to be, what approach should one adopt in its regard? Should one adopt a fatalistic attitude, and believe that education can do nothing? Should education merely adapt itself to this phenomenon, something that would be tantamount to adopting the first approaches considered earlier (in 1.3)?

I believe that education, without falling in either of the two traps referred to in this essay; i.e. accepting fatalistically the order of things or, in idealist fashion, thinking that all problems may be healed through some sheer formula or set of ideas, can grapple with the situation in a humanising and progressive manner.

As stated in the previous section, education is no monolith. Hence it can be a site where resistance to sweeping phenomena may be organised, wary that this cannot be the only site where resistance is waged, and open to other radical projects in other fields. Thinking otherwise, that it may be the only site, would lead us back to the idealism discussed earlier. The situation is illustrated excellently by Paulo Freire in his book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”:

This solution cannot be achieved in idealistic terms. In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. This perception is a necessary but not a

sufficient condition for liberation; it must become the motivating force for liberating action. Nor does the discovery by the oppressed that they exist in dialectical relationship to the oppressor, as his antithesis - that without them the oppressor could not exist - in itself constitute liberation. The oppressed can overcome the contradiction in which they are caught only when this perception enlists them in the struggle to free themselves.

(Freire 1993, 31)

Note first of all the emphasis Freire makes in the last sentence, wherein he claims that the perception of reality, which education ought to furnish, is not the 'be all and end all' of the emancipatory struggle (in idealist fashion,) but the preliminary to '*enlist them in the struggle*'. All suggestions regarding education should be made in light of wider political-emancipatory movement both on a local and a global level.

Note also the emphasis on the need for the oppressed to understand reality: not merely the mechanics of the situation but also its limits and relativity. Education thus, must be critical in the Kantian sense of the term, wherein by critique one understands an analysis of the conditions of existence and possibilities of a phenomenon. This would enable one not merely to understand concretely a concrete situation, but also, empower her/him to work so as to achieve change.

The need to weave a critical pedagogy is discussed at length by McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001, 271) who point to the oppressive forces and effects of globalization and emphasise the need for people not to resign themselves fatalistically to the current situation but to embrace a critical pedagogy which develops new educational strategies in order to counter these forces. The aim of such pedagogy should be the empowerment of individuals (educators, and consequently students) so that these may understand and act effectively in a globalised world; and also struggle for social justice (in light of which education can and ought to be transformed). This latter aspect is fundamental. Critique itself is not enough. As Freire notes:

A mere (albeit correct) perception of reality not followed by this critical intervention will not lead to a transformation of objective reality....This is the case of a purely subjectivist perception by someone who forsakes objective reality and creates a false substitute. (Freire 1993, 34)

A critical pedagogy goes beyond reflective practices which, far from being emancipatory and empowering for teachers (in terms of them challenging assumptions), can only serve to reinforce existing beliefs. The practice of reflection is

itself a product of specific historical power relations; ways of thinking are subject to and produced by social practices of discipline and normalization. While, as Manternach (2002, 280) maintains, it is important for teachers to illuminate considerations of power and become aware of those assumptions (bureaucratic, economic, political and linguistic factors shaping education) that are working against them in order to make meaningful, just and caring curricular decisions, it is hard to distinguish between transgressive practices of reflection and those that are complicit with existing power hierarchies (Fendler 2003, 2).

Today's discourse of reflection includes a wide range of meanings, mixed messages and confusing agendas (Fendler 2003, 9) and further research is needed in order to demonstrate that as a pedagogy, it can encourage the development of skills, attitudes and knowledge. The use of learner-centred education (for teachers and learners to become critical thinkers) and reflection are at the forefront of educational discourse, implying a highly desirable and effective pedagogy, yet most of the literature often fails to explain how teachers become able to apply their thinking to a wide array of global issues and respond to new questions and challenges.

Radical teacher educators who acknowledge that teachers' work is the production and reproduction of knowledge, attitudes and ideology, put forward diverse recommendations. It is argued that one of the factors that contributed to a loss of critical thought is the current culture of performativity and strict regulation and self-regulation by teachers of their own pedagogy (Ball 1999; Mahoney and Hextall 2000; Boxley 2003 as cited by Hill 2007, 211). In response to this, teachers are to adopt the functions of intellectuals and to resist becoming mere managers; they must engage in self-criticism, understand their potential role in transforming society and be able to interrelate critique theory and practice (Hill 2007, 216/7).

My final observation goes towards this last point, i.e. the interrelation of critique theory and practice. Apart from being critical, I believe that education needs to be also realistic. It must enable teachers and students to critically grapple themselves with the phenomenon, and seek what can be done **concretely** in different situations. This is essential, particularly to inhabitants of peripheral and, in world-wide terms, minor places like Malta. Ultra-radical and ultra-critical discourses (for instance, Stiglitz's *Globalization and its discontents*) weaved against phenomena like capitalism and

globalisation (generally treated in homogenous and abstract terms) tend towards infantile ultra-leftism, a bourgeois malaise of an idealistic kind, which through futile anathemae against such wide-ranging phenomena, may make one turn a blind eye to local power struggles and concrete or realistic possibilities regarding such struggles. Intervention in the educational field must steer between the two debilities of a fatalism and a cheap voluntarism.

### **1.6 Concluding observations**

My attempts have been to characterise and clarify some of the debates surrounding the phenomenon of globalisation and its multiple effects on education and policy formation. Negative outcomes and recommendations abound, so I feel that I should conclude this essay with a morsel of hope.

While for some globalisation has been an instrument for progress, creating wealth, expanded opportunities and a nurturing environment for entrepreneurship and enterprise, for others it has exacerbated inequalities and insecurity. Definitely, it brought about fundamental changes to the way societies are formulating educational policy and practice. In the discussions I presented one can see specific and concrete implications of how education is changing, and will need to change, in response to these new circumstances.

I believe that even if changes are inevitable, they can become more equitable and just. Educators must acknowledge the force of these trends, and see their implications for shaping and constraining the choices available to educational policies and practices, yet resist the rhetoric of 'inevitability' that often drives particular policy prescriptions. Situating the contemporary debate within a historical framework assists one to re-examine this apparent inevitability - changes, that have been at work for a long time, can indeed be observed in the field of education. All is not lost.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my tutors Professor Peter Mayo and Professor Ronald G. Sultana for providing continuous support and encouragement, Mr Michael Grech for

his insightful comments and suggestions, and the referees of this paper for their constructive and pertinent proposals.

## Notes

- [1](#) An economic set-up based upon the production and acquisition of knowledge, especially in areas like computer technology and biotechnology.
- [2](#) This maintains that schools have an impact on pupil performance and thus changing schools could improve performance and educational standards.
- [3](#) Teachers have to play complex and diverse roles, not only as subject specialists, but also as assessors and curriculum counselors, while at the same time contributing to the wider goals of their school as a whole - Young 1998, 59. Education systems and policies, controlled by the state, make demands on the role of teachers - Bonal and Rambla 2003, 171.
- [4](#) The use of or reliance on voluntary action to maintain an institution, carry out a policy or achieve an end - Bullock and Trombley (1999, 912).
- [5](#) Power over educational set-ups and curricula; their goals; power in relation to economic structures, etc.
- [6](#) Refer to the section of Global education models - a criticism
- [7](#) Argentina had to pay high interest rates on growing foreign debt; the region has an inferior position in the global economy; a great mass of workers was discarded by deindustrialization.
- [8](#) Universities in the US, England, many parts of Western and Eastern Europe and major parts of Asia.

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